



LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Practical Ideas & Suggestions
to Promote Religious Vocations

Accentuate Your Charism by Involving Youth in Loving Service

BY RHONDA GRUENEWALD

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven.”—Mt 5:16

Many priests and consecrated men and women say that they heard the call to their vocation when they were on a mission trip, working with the poor, or volunteering at a hospital. Serving others gives us a glimpse of pure love.

We have plenty of examples of saints who have given their lives in service from whom we can gain inspiration: St. Jeanne Jugan, St. Angela Merici, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Teresa of Calcutta, and your own founder or foundress.

Unfortunately, today’s society seems to value the individual, short-term pleasure, and money and power. Pope Francis advises us that when “faced with people who seek power and success, the disciples are called to do the opposite.” Those who exercise “genuine authority” in the Church and the Christian community are those who serve others and “lack real prestige.” Jesus calls people, says Pope



Francis, “to pass from the thirst for power to the joy of quiet service.”¹

How can we challenge the youth of today to give their lives in service for something greater than themselves, if they *never* serve others?

I would like you to invite the youth to discover and experience your specific charism as expressed in your particular apostolate or ministry. Perhaps by accentuating your charism in this way, young men and women of today will find their true path to holiness. No matter which vocation a young person chooses, service will be a part of life. I serve my husband and children most of the day in a variety of ways. Learning to serve others selflessly is like opening a door to what God wants from all of us.

Does your community or institute of consecrated life serve the sick or aged? Invite young people to join you for a day of service, once a month. Give them a real opportunity to

connect with those they are serving, too, instead of only changing sheets or cleaning rooms when patients or residents are out of the room. I realize that is service, too, but the point is to see Christ in others and to be Christ for others. So, give them every opportunity to care for and about the people through interpersonal interaction.

Is part of your charism serving the poor by operating in a soup kitchen or food pantry, or by helping the homeless? I know many youth groups who assist others by volunteering together to serve the poor by working in a food pantry or assisting at a shelter. Why not connect with your local parish youth minister or young adult group to see if they can help you serve? Furthermore, invite families to join you in this mission in some way. There is always plenty to do in preparing, serving or distributing food, clearing tables and washing dishes.





Do you serve the Church by teaching? Whether you do so at a Catholic school or maybe by teaching catechism or giving religious instruction at a nearby parish, you can let your charism's light shine brighter by involving older teens and young adults. Why not invite a young person to serve as an assistant by assigning them specific tasks? Make sure you include them in the preparation of the lesson plans and any student evaluations or testing. Such opportunities offer a complete picture of what catechesis is all about—forming and integrating the heart, mind and soul.

Besides volunteering at our local food bank every summer, my own parish youth ministry takes a mission trip to Laredo, Texas, to volunteer at an orphanage. The high school students and chaperones serve alongside the religious sisters, playing with the children, making crafts, eating lunch with them. Through this lively interaction, these young people come to know each child and consecrated sister a little better and gain a glimpse of what that pure love feels and looks like. It is amazing to witness the impact that these consecrated religious have on the young women and men by inviting them to share in their charism.

In the Gospel Our Lord instructs, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Mt 10:39). Mahatma Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." As consecrated

women and men, you understand this as you have given your life to serve God and His Church in your institute's charism. You found yourself and your path to holiness by serving others in the spirit of your founder or foundress. In this way you are letting your let shine by inviting young people to experience the same!✠



An Open Invitation to Make a Difference in this World

The Little Sisters of the Poor have programs for high school or college students looking for a way to make a difference in the world, or for a place to volunteer their time and talents; or if youth ministers or teachers looking for a worthwhile service site for their group or class

Drawing from their charism of hospitality as exemplified by their foundress, St. Jeanne Jugan, young people are always welcome into their homes, for they bring joy and new life to the elderly like no one else can.

Youth are welcome individually or in groups to entertain the residents, animate a dance or bingo party, or perform a variety of



service projects—from raking leaves and washing windows to peeling vegetables or cleaning wheelchairs.

Many of the homes have a Hospitality Club for Catholic girls (junior high and/or high school) who wish to volunteer on an ongoing basis, while sharing in times of prayer and recreation with the Little Sisters and other young women. These clubs usually meet

one Saturday per month for several hours.

The community also has a live-in service program is open to college-age Catholic women who wish to experience their life and mission firsthand over an extended period of time. Week-long experiences are possible during fall, winter or spring break.

Summer placements are also possible in many of the Little Sisters' homes in the United States and even can be arranged abroad for those with some foreign language ability. All this experiences provide an opportunity for young people to share in the charism of the community as they discern God's will for their lives.